## The Jewish Veteran



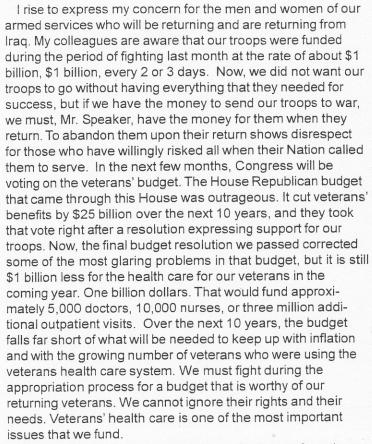
OCTOBER 2003

## **REP. BOB FILNER**

## Let Us Not Abandon Our Troops When They Return Home

(A speech delivered to the House of Representatives)

by Representative Bob Filner (D-CA)



We hope and pray that we do not have veterans from the current conflict who become ill with Gulf War illness, but we must prepare for that possibility. And we must not forget the warriors of the first Gulf War who are sick, tens of thousands of them, and are still waiting to learn the cause and the cure for their illnesses.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we need to change the whole process of funding our veterans' health care. Right now, each year in Congress, as we are doing this year, we have to fight for a health care budget. In the last session, there was legislation to change VA health care funding so that the amount of funding would automatically rise each year to accommodate inflation and new enrollees, that is, for example, to accommodate the returning veterans from Iraq. I will



again, and I urge all my colleagues, to cosponsor this bill when it is reintroduced this session. And we must work hard for its passage.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, 200,000 veterans are waiting more than 6 months for their first health care appointment. In fact, veterans will die while waiting for that first appointment. We must resolve to change this immoral situation.

When our active-duty soldiers from the war in Iraq leave service, many are qualified for educational benefits under the Montgomery GI bill. This is an earned benefit that allows them to reenter civilian life as educated and productive members. But the current GI bill benefits are woefully inadequate to do the job. Back in 1944, this bill paid for the full cost of college tuition. But now it barely pays for two-thirds of the average cost of attending a 4-year public college. We must work to provide funding for the full cost of tuition fees, books, and supplies for those who do serve 4 years of active duty in the military service. I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, because there are so many other areas that need more funding than is currently budgeted. We will soon be commemorating Memorial Day. We will be hearing words of support for our veterans from all Members of Congress as they speak to Memorial Day crowds. But words can be cheap. What is important is how we vote.

We have the money. We have the resources. It is a question of priorities. It is a question of will. Let us make our veterans, who are returning from war, proud of us. There is one final thing I want to say. A substantive way we can assist our veterans is to guarantee them jobs with companies that are awarded government contracts to rebuild Iraq, and I have introduced a bill to do just that. It is called the Let U.S. Veterans Rebuild Iraq Act, which will treat our veterans with the respect they deserve and provide a tangible way to better their lives. They fought for freedom in Iraq, who better to get involved in securing the future for Iraq?